

## **Project updates**

**Electrification of the Anticline** – Rocky Mountain Power (RMP) has proposed to build 17 miles of electric double-circuit 25kv distribution lines and eight miles of other distribution lines to provide power to eight distinct locations on the south end of the Anticline, beginning just north of Paradise Road and proceeding south and east along the backbone of the Anticline to Highway 191. RMP is also proposing approximately 5 miles of 69 kV transmission line from Highway 351 to the Boulder South County Road 23-106, a substation south of Highway 351 and west of the North Jonah Road, and a 10 mile reroute of the authorized Paradise 230 kV transmission line. Currently, this line is authorized to parallel Highway 191 to Highway 351 then follow Highway 351 to Paradise Road. The reroute would have the line go from Highway 191 west to the Falcon Compressor area and then north along the backbone of the Anticline to Highway 351 parallel to the above mentioned 25 kV distribution line. The BLM PFO has developed an interdisciplinary team and is working with the third-party contractor to initiate the development of the Environmental Assessment. BLM initiated public scoping for the project on January 6 and held an open house to allow the public to better familiarize themselves with the project on February 1. **The scoping period closed on February 6.** An Environmental Assessment will be available for public review this month. BLM anticipates that construction for this project will begin this summer.

**NPL EIS** – Proposal to drill 3500 wells south and west of the Jonah Field. Scoping report is on the web. BLM held mtgs. with Counties on November 9, 2011 to discuss transportation planning. BLM is working with a third party contractor to create the alternatives that will be considered in the EIS. We are still working with DEQ and EPA to determine the effect of the recent EPA decision on ozone nonattainment area for Sublette County on the alternatives and schedule for the EIS.

**LaBarge EIS** – Proposal to drill 838 wells in the Big Piney – LaBarge area. Contractor is working on developing alternatives for the EIS. The pending EPA decision regarding non-attainment for the Upper Green River area, which includes the La Barge Project area, has affected the completion schedule. BLM is working cooperatively with DEQ and EPA to resolve key details about how the nonattainment designation will be managed and what changes will be needed in the alternatives.

**Rands Butte Helium Plant** – Denbury's plant was scheduled to be online by the end of 2011 but they are experiencing some difficulties and are not certain when it will be operational. Denbury has contacted us and three other BLM field offices to discuss building a CO2 pipeline from the Riley Ridge Unit to the Casper area. They will be submitting the Right of Way application during the month of May 2012. The project would include building a sweetening plant somewhere near Denbury's existing plant. Originally the H2S and CO2 were to be re-injected but Denbury now would like to separate the two gas components, re-inject only the H2S, and transport the CO2 for use in oil recovery projects on the other side of the state.

## **Annual Drilling Plans, Anticline**

The Pinedale Field Office approved drilling plans for the Anticline Operators for the period between Feb 2012 and Feb 2013 at the annual planning meeting on February 23, 2012. The operators have completed development 1 mile north of the New Fork River Corridor in DA-2 and, as per the ROD, are planning development in DA-3 south of the river.

At the annual planning meeting BLM approved approximately 220 wells for the February – February period. The approved development plans also include building or expanding 15 new pads and placing 52 pads into interim reclamation. In comparison to last year's Feb 2011 to Feb 2012 requests, this is a 38% reduction in proposed drilling activity and 29% reduction in new pads from last year. With continuing low gas prices, some operators are further reducing their development plans, and it is anticipated that fewer than the currently approved 220 wells will actually be drilled in the Feb 2012 to Feb 2013 period.

## **Well spud report as of May 1, 2012**

As of May 1<sup>st</sup> a total of 2,419 wells have been spud on the Anticline, 1,130 since the signing of the ROD in September 2008 and 15 thus far in 2012. In comparison to this period last year, this is a 35% reduction in pace (Last year by May the Operators had spud 23 wells).

## **PAPO Reclamation Update**

The PAPO presented an update of the status of surface disturbance and reclamation on the Anticline at the February 23 annual operator's meeting.

Additionally, the PAPO posted proposed Adaptive Management (AM) relating to minor wording changes in the Record of Decision's Reclamation Plan (Appendix C) and more substantive changes in the "Monitoring for Reclamation Success" (MFRS) plan. The proposed AM changes were public noticed April 11-25. A meeting with Pinedale Anticline operators on April 30 provided information on the AM process along with a roundtable discussion on the Pinedale Anticline Data Management System (PADMS).

Public comments that were received from the AM public notice were from Pinedale Anticline operators and one of their contractors (North Wind Resource Consulting). The AM Review Team has reviewed and responded to the public comments and prepared a revised draft of the MFRS to be made available for Pinedale Anticline operators and their contractors for the 2012 field season. The AM Review Team is composed of PAPO team members, a BLM National Operation Center employee, and a BLM range management supervisor. The Review Team also receives input from other BLM and PAPO specialists.

Another meeting with Pinedale Anticline operators was held on May 9. The purpose of this meeting was to determine reclamation methodology for the 2012 field season since the MFRS plan will not be finalized until April 2013 Does the PAWG wish to review the AM reclamation proposal and provide advice to the DFO?

The PAPO has continued to work with the USGS and the Pinedale Anticline operators to improve PADMS. PAPO staff requested the PAPO Board approve additional monies to fund tasks to enhance the system, continue hosting and support of the system, as well as operation and

maintenance through federal fiscal year 2013. The PAPO Board approved funding for these tasks at its May 3 meeting in Pinedale.

## **Mitigation Projects**

In response to providing greater priority for funding projects that relate to matrix-listed species, the PAPO revised the project selection criteria this past March. This resulted in the following four projects being recommended and approved by the PAPO Board on May 3:

1. Mesa wildlife-friendly fence project (\$500,000 directly benefits mule deer and pronghorn).
2. Mesa well project (\$51,500 directly benefits, sage grouse and indirectly benefits resident mule deer).
3. Mesa fertilization data collection project (\$100,000 indirectly benefits mule deer by better informing decision-makers and the public as to the success of the fertilization project in achieving habitat improvement objectives).
4. Mule deer NEPA/cultural project (\$100,000 to complete NEPA and cultural surveys in proposed habitat improvement mitigation treatments on the Mesa and adjacent transitional ranges which would directly benefit mule deer and sage grouse).

Additional information on the four funded PAPO projects:

The Mesa wildlife friendly fence project will be managed by the Wyoming Land Trust with BLM and the PAPO being cooperators/partners. Project implementation should begin this summer on inventorying and potentially modifying up to 100 miles of fence on the Mesa.

The Mesa Well project will begin this summer with NEPA work and coordination with the Mesa Common Allotment permittees.

A Request for Proposals was submitted by PAPO Game & Fish staff earlier this year for the Mesa fertilization data collection project. A contractor was recently selected with work on the project to begin by June 2012.

An interdisciplinary team has been formalized by the BLM and PAPO for the Sublette Mule Deer Habitat Improvement project. Since funding for the NEPA and cultural work has been approved, work on selecting a contractor through the RFP process has begun and a contractor should begin work later this summer.

## **Wildlife Monitoring & Mitigation Plan**

The plan was recently revised based on comments received during a public notice comment period in March 2012. A revised plan will be posted on the PAPO website by late May 2012.

## **PAPO Website**

The PAPO is currently going through the process to update the website. An updated website, including a revised PAPO funded project selection process, is planned to be fully functional by June 29, 2012.

## **PAPO Board Meeting in Pinedale on May 3 and Mesa Field Trip on May 2**

Besides funding the aforementioned projects and PADMS through 2013, the Board participated in a tour of the Mesa coordinated and hosted by the PAPO. Members of the public, BLM staff and a Casper Star Tribune (CST) photographer and CST reporter discussed on-going and proposed mitigation projects during the field trip. These projects included: the Mesa winter range January 1-April 30 closure to protect wintering mule deer; the Mesa rangeland fertilization project; the Mesa fertilization data collection project; the Mesa well project; the Mesa wildlife-friendly fence project; Mesa reclamation and enhancement opportunities; conservation easements/wildlife corridors and the Sublette Mule Deer Habitat Improvement project (that has both on-site and off-site components).

## **2012 Resource Projects**

**Landscape Planning** – This process includes Range and Transportation management planning and is directed at the Boulder, North LaBarge and Ryegrass landscapes. Status is as follows:

1. Boulder – Data collection complete. A Rangeland Health Assessment is in progress and is planned for release in early June. An environmental assessment to consider renewal of grazing permits for grazing allotments in this area will then be completed. We are planning to release this EA by the end of September. Interested public scoping to include public meetings will be initiated when we release the Rangeland Health Assessment and begin the EA.
2. North LaBarge – Presently in the data collection and monitoring phase 2012, 2013. Riparian Proper Functioning Condition Assessments were completed in 2011. Est. completion of EA 9/30/2014.
3. Ryegrass – Presently in the data collection and monitoring phase in 2011 and 2012. Est. completion of EA 9/30/2013.

**South LaBarge Ecological Site Inventory** – a contract is being developed to conduct ecological site inventory across approximately 98,000 acres in the South LaBarge Common Allotment. Inventory is expected to occur this summer with a report due next summer.

**Wyoming Range Front Aspen Regeneration Project** – Aspen habitat for 2012 regeneration will occur in two phases,

1. Camp Creek underwent mechanical treatment in 2010 and was broadcast burned in spring 2011. Unburned areas within the Camp Creek areas will be treated with additional broadcast burns in 2012.
2. The Upper Billies Allotment will be broadcast burned in 2012 (currently scheduled to begin May 19). The allotment will be rested for 2 years following this treatment and monitoring of the area will be conducted to evaluate the effects of the treatment with results compared to our objectives.
3. Miller Creek will undergo mechanical treatment in summer 2012. Treatment will consist of conifer removal and piling. Piles will be burned when conditions warrant.

**Muddy Creek Vegetation Treatment** – EA and Decision Record signed in September of 2011. This 300 acre herbicide (Spike) treatment will be conducted in fall of 2012 to improve mule deer habitat by removing sagebrush and promoting grass and forb growth.

**Anticline Mesa Fertilization Project** - Phase I, which involved the treatment of 1000 acres on the Mesa, was completed in November 2011. Application was at a 40 pounds/acre rate of nitrogen. To respond to various concerns regarding the validation of effects of this treatment method, data collection efforts will be expanded during the next two field seasons and may be contracted to a third party. PAPO prepared a solicitation for proposals in early 2012 and a selection will be made soon.

**LaBarge Mule Deer Habitat Enhancement Project** – The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has proposed a series of on-the-ground vegetation treatments designed to improve the quality of mule deer habitat across more than 20,000 acres in the LaBarge area over a ten-year period. Proposed treatments include fertilization, herbicide, mowing, aerating, burning, and controlled grazing. An environmental assessment will be prepared for the proposed project. The project is currently in the interdisciplinary team review stage and will sent out for public scoping and review in the next few months. Implementation of the project is expected to begin in 2014

**Wildlife Friendly Fencing Inventory** – The PFO, JIO/PAPO, and Wyoming Land Trust will be continuing their partnership to inventory fencing on BLM lands for the purpose of modifying fences so that wildlife can migrate freely throughout PFO.

**Lander Road Interpretive Signs** – Four interpretive signs will be installed at the existing Lander Road interpretive site on Highway 191. One sign will be located adjacent to the existing sign and will include a map with highlights of the Lander Road through the Pinedale Anticline and directions to local museums and the New Fork Crossing Park. A 200-foot walking path will be created from the turn-out to a viewpoint from which the historic trail is clearly visible. Three interpretive signs will be installed at the viewpoint. Topics on those signs include: history of Frederick Lander and the Lander Road, a description of life on the emigrant trails, and energy development in the Pinedale Anticline. Installation is expected in early July. This will mark the completion of the mitigation requirements of the Lander Road Programmatic Agreement. (Signs will be displayed at the PAWG meeting.)

## **Resource Monitoring Overview**

**Sage grouse winter concentration** – PFO, RSFO and JIO/PAPO biologist participated in Sage-grouse winter concentration flights within a 2 mile buffer of the proposed NPL gas field and within the boundaries of 6 lek complexes associated with the Pinedale Anticline Project Area. Over 400,000 acres were covered by these flights. Data is currently being processed and will be available soon.

**Aerial lek Searches** – Aerial lek searches were conducted within an 11 mile buffer of the proposed NPL gas field (except where previous surveys overlap with the buffer) and in 3 lek complexes associated with the PAPA (Duke's Triangle Complex, Speedway Complex, and Yellowpoint Complex.

**Winter Range Closure** – Over 500,000 acres of crucial winter range in the PFO is closed to motorized vehicles each year to minimize impacts and stress to wintering wildlife. In addition to law enforcement efforts, PFO staff members conducted weekend winter patrols to help generate

awareness about the closures and assist in patrolling the area for violators. Closures were lifted on May 1. This winter, a total of 102 vehicles were observed, contact was made with 75 individuals, and nine individuals were found to be in violation of the closures. Closure maps and copies of the federal register notice were provided to contacted individuals and the violators were referred to the BLM law enforcement officer.

### **Staffing Update**

- Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist Kellie Roadifer (vice-Schultz) started on March 14
- Rangeland Management Specialist Tony Howard (vice-Robbins) started on March 14
- PAPO will be pursuing the recruitment of a Natural Resource Specialist to compliment the on-board PAPO staff and assist with mitigation project planning.

### **Calendar**

- AUGUST 7, 8; PAWG summer meeting. Wildlife and Reclamation emphasis, Pinedale
- AUGUST (date to be determined); PAPA Air and Water Planning Meeting, Pinedale
- DECEMBER 6; PAPO Board Meeting, Cheyenne